### Case 2:17-cv-02726-MMB\_ Document 1\_ Filed 06/16/17 Page 1 of 14

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

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I. (a) PLAINTIFFS				DEFENDANT:	S				
SILVIA YOVT	CHEVA			G ANTHONY Y	UTHAS F	SO			
		Philadelphia	G. ANTHONY YUTHAS, ESQ.						
	EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF C.			County of Residence	e of First Liste	d Defendant _			
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(c) Attorneys (Firm Name,	Address, and Telephone Numbe	r)		THE TRAC	T OF LAND IN	VOLVED.			
Robert P. Cocco, P.	•	•,		Attorneys (If Known)					
•	e.900, Philadelphia, PA	19102		Attorneys (1) Known)	•				
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				For Diversity Cases Only)		. ,	and One Box for		
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VI. CAUSE OF ACTION	)N Brief description of co	use: fraudulent debt resol	lution/apll	ation comings in violet	ion of EDCD	A at al			
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# Case 2:17-cv-02726-MMRE UNDENDEATES DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

#### **CASE MANAGEMENT TRACK DESIGNATION FORM**

: CIVIL ACTION

SILVIA YOVTCHEVA

v.

G. ANT	THON	Y YUTHAS, ESQ. et al.	: NO.		
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	(d)	Asbestos Cases involving claims for injury or property damage from expo	•	(	)
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FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENDERSONAL-DESIGNATION FORMATION FORMATION TO BE LIMINATED THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENDERSONAL-DESIGNATION FORMATION OF PENDERSONAL -DESIGNATION OF PEN Address of Plaintiff: 2375 Woodward St., Apt. 702, Philadelphia, PA 19115 Address of Defendant: 2 Baldwin Place, Chester, PA 19022. Place of Accident, Incident or Transaction:. (Use Reverse Side For Additional Space) Yes □ No ☑ Does this case involve multidistrict litigation possibilities? None. RELATED CASE, IF ANY: Case Number: \_\_\_ Judge \_ Date Terminated: \_ Civil cases are deemed related when yes is answered to any of the following questions: 1. Is this case related to property included in an earlier numbered suit pending or within one year previously terminated action in this court? Yes 🗌 No 🗹 2. Does this case involve the same issue of factor grow out of the same transaction as a prior suit pending or within one year previously terminated action in this court? Yes 🗌 No 🗹 3. Does this case involve the validity or infringement of a patent already in suit or any earlier numbered case pending or within one year previously terminated action in this court? Yes 🗌 No 🗹 CIVIL: (Place ✓ in ONE CATEGORY ONLY) A. Federal Question Cases: B. Diversity Jurisdiction Cases: Indemnity Contract, Marine Contract, and All Other Contracts 1. Insurance Contract and Other Contracts FELA 2. Airplane Personal Injury Jones Act-Personal Injury 3. Assault, Defamation ☐ Antitrust 4. Marine Personal Injury Patent 5. Motor Vehicle Personal Injury Labor-Management Relations 6. Other Personal Injury (Please specify) Civil Rights 7. Products Liability Habeas Corpus 8. Products Liability - Asbestos Securities Act(s) Cases 9. All other Diversity Cases 10. Social Security Review Cases All other Federal Question Cases 11. (Please specify) ım of \$150,000.00 exclusive of

	ARBITRATION ( Check ap	DERTIFICATION  opropriate Category)	
ı, Robert P. Cocco,	counsel of record do hereby certify:		
Pursuant to Local Civil Rule 53.2, Section 3(c interest and costs;	)(2), that to the best of my knowledge ar	d belief, the damages recoverable in this civil	action case exceed the su
Relief other than monetary damages is sou	ght.		
	Robert P. Cocco	61907	
Atto NOTE: A trial de novo will be a tr	rney-at-Law ial by jury only if there has beer	compliance with F.R.C.P. 38	Attorney I. D.#
I certify that, to my knowledge, the within case is not related	to any case now pending or within one y	ear previously terminated action in this court	except as noted above.
DATE: 6/16/17	Masee princy-at-Law	61907 Attomey I.D.#	<u>.</u>

## UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

EASTER DISTRICT	OT TENNISTE VIEWE
SILVIA YOVTCHEVA,	Civil Action No. 17-2726
Plaintiff,	
v.	
G. ANTHONY YUTHAS, ESQ., individually and d/b/a LAW OFFICES OF G. ANTHONY YUTHAS and d/b/a HARBOR LEGAL GROUP, LLC	
LAW OFFICES OF G. ANTHONY YUTHAS	
HARBOR LEGAL GROUP, LLC	
FINANCE SOLUTIONS LLC,	
Defendants.	

#### **COMPLAINT**

#### Jurisdiction and Venue

- 1. Jurisdiction arises under 15 U.S.C. § 1692k(d), 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331, 1337(a), together with the pendent jurisdiction of the court. Supplemental jurisdiction over Plaintiff's state law claims is granted by 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a).
- 2. Venue lies in this judicial district in that the events which gave rise to this claim occurred here.

#### **Parties**

- 3. Plaintiff, SILVIA YOVTCHEVA, is an adult individual residing at 2375 Woodward St., Apt. 702, Philadelphia, PA 19115.
- 4. Defendant, G. ANTHONY YUTHAS ("Attorney Yuthas") d/b/a Law Offices of G. Anthony Yuthas and Harbor Legal Group, LLC is an adult individual doing business as a debt settlement organization at 200 Union Blvd, Suite 200, Lakewood, Colorado, 80228, at all times material also doing business as an attorney admitted to practice of law in the State of Colorado and not so admitted in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- 5. Defendant LAW OFFICES OF G. ANTHONY YUTHAS ("Law Firm"), with principal offices at 200 Union Blvd, Suite 200, Lakewood, Colorado, 80228, is a professional corporation conducting business in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- 6. Defendants Yuthas and Law Firm are sometimes collectively referred to herein as "the Yuthas Defendants".
- 7. Defendant, HARBOR LEGAL GROUP, LLC ("Harbor"), is a Colorado limited liability corporation maintaining a principle place of business at 200 Union Blvd, Suite 200, Lakewood, Colorado, 80228 and is at all times material business as a debt settlement organization.
- 8. Defendant, FINANCE SOLUTIONS LLC ("FS"), is a New York limited liability corporation maintaining a principle place of business at 132 East 43<sup>rd</sup> Street # 237, New York, NY 10017 and is at all times material business as a debt settlement organization.
  - 9. Upon information and belief, Harbor is nothing more than an alter ego of

Yuthas over which Yuthas exercised complete dominion and control as a vehicle for Yuthas and his accomplices to deceive unsuspecting and desperate consumers into paying them large sums of money under the pretext of "debt settlement". The scheme involved promising debt relief to vulnerable consumers which is nothing more than an illusory scheme to collect funds from these consumers that they could better use themselves to negotiate debt settlements or pursue alternate traditional forms of debt remediation as discussed below.

10. At all times relevant hereto, defendants acted by and through their agents, servants, and employees who acted within the scope of their authority and within the course of their employment.

#### **Background - Nature of Debt Settlement Operations Generally**

- 11. Debt settlement is a form of consumer debt relief, targeted to consumers with thousands of dollars of unsecured debt.
- 12. Unlike debt remediation options such as traditional credit counseling, debt management plans, debt consolidation loans, and possibly bankruptcy, debt settlement is an aggressive form of debt relief in which consumers stop paying all of their unsecured debts and begin saving the money they would normally use to pay those debts.
- 13. After several months, when the accounts are in default, the debt settlement company will contact the creditor, and negotiate a lump-sum payoff of the debt, ideally at a highly reduced percentage.
- 14. The consumer then uses the money that he/she has been saving to pay the lump-sum, and can then have the benefit of a significant portion of their original debt being forgiven. As will be described later herein, defendants did not allow plaintiff to use

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saved funds for negotiated payoffs but incredibly demanded additional funds towards such payments.

- 15. Because debt settlement only works if consumers are not making monthly payments on their unsecured debts (since creditors will not want to settle a debt if they are receiving monthly payments), there are inherent risks involved with participating in a debt settlement program that can have catastrophic effects on the consumer. Specifically, consumers entering a debt settlement program may experience any or all of the following:
  - a. Because the creditor is no longer receiving monthly payments, creditors
     will likely engage in collection activities including filing a lawsuit against
     the consumer for breaking their contract.
  - b. The consumer will owe significantly more on their account if a settlement is reached and concomitantly reduce the actual savings from the debt settlement program because creditors will continue to assess interest, late fees, over-limit charges, and any other fees associated with the account.
  - c. The consumer's credit reports will reflect the late charges and nonpayment of their unsecured debt causing the consumer's credit score to
    drop while participating in the program and the consumer may experience
    the long term effects of a low credit score, which can include difficulty in
    buying a house or car, obtaining insurance, or obtaining employment.
  - d. Creditors are under no obligation to accept, or even entertain, a settlement offer.
  - 16. Debt settlement is largely a "for-profit" industry involving companies

charging consumers large fees typically calculated as a percentage of the total debt the consumer brings into the program and often collected in the first several months of the program.

#### **Factual Allegations**

- 17. On or about May 16, 2015, plaintiff entered into a standardized adhesion contract of exculpation in an illusory several page contract whereby she agreed to pay substantial sums to defendant, but in the exculpatory fine print defendant essentially disclaimed any obligation to perform any debt settlement or legal services for her, and disclaimed any representations that it would actually perform such services.
- 18. In order to get relief from her over \$33,000 debt in cumulative debt from six (6) credit cards, Plaintiff had to agree to pay a flat retainer Fee of \$900.00, and a \$515.66 monthly payment which ostensibly includes a monthly maintenance fee of \$89.00 for "debt review" and other fees and charges, and accumulate additional funds in a separate "settlement savings fund" escrow account.
- 19. On or about May 21, 2015, plaintiff began communicating via email with defendant FS regarding the debt settlement services she contracted for with the Yuthas defendants.
- 20. Upon information and belief, the Yuthas defendants contracted with FS to negotiate the debt settlement it had contracted with plaintiff to effectuate despite the fact that FS does not appear as a party to the debt settlement contract between plaintiff and the Yuthas defendants.
- 21. Plaintiff paid twenty one (21) monthly staggered installments of \$515.66 and was obligated to do prior to the performance of any debt negotiation activities.

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- 22. The contract's term is four (4) years to purportedly accumulate sufficient reserves to negotiate plaintiff's debts with his creditors.
- 23. In February 2017, plaintiff was contacted by someone from defendant HLG with a proposed settlement of a \$1,155.15 debt for \$739.30 to be paid from her HLG savings account.
  - 24. Plaintiff approved the settlement and paid it(?).
- 25. In May 2017, plaintiff was contacted by someone from defendant HLG with a proposed settlement of a \$2,133.65 debt for \$1,066.83 to be paid, to plaintiff's surprise, from her own funds rather than the over \$111,000 in her HLG savings account.
- 26. Shocked at the prospect of paying the proposed settlement from funds in addition to the \$11,000+ already paid to defendants over two (2) years with only a \$300 reduction of debt to show for it, plaintiff recognized the nature of the fraudulent debt relif scheme that defendants had perpetrated upon her.
- 27. Defendants' contract with plaintiff for debt settlement services is void insofar as it promises nothing real and its purpose is to give the appearance of legal propriety to illegal debt settlement activities detailed in this Complaint, thereby enriching defendant at the expense of heavily indebted Pennsylvania consumers, and preempting for itself consumers' money that should have been used to pay creditors or to file for bankruptcy relief.
  - 28. Plaintiff suffered ascertainable loss by reason of defendant's actions.

#### Causes of Action

## <u>COUNT I</u> – Violations of the FDCPA (Plaintiff v. All defendants)

29. Plaintiff incorporates all foregoing allegations as though set forth in full.

- 30. At all times relevant hereto Defendants were regularly engaged in attempting to collect debts and were attempting to collect for creditors debts incurred for personal, family or household purposes such that each debit is a "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(5).
- 31. The above contacts made between the Plaintiff and Defendants regarding the debt settlements including the May 2017 debt settlement were "communications" relating to a "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(2) and 1692a(5) of the FDCPA.
- 32. Because Defendants' business model is premised on compromising the amount of debt owed rather than eliminating it as an attorney filing a chapter 7 bankruptcy or defending a debt collection litigation, all of the above contacts by Defendants were with the purpose of engaging or aiding indirectly in collecting plaintiff's debts owed or alleged to be owed to her creditors.
- 33. Defendants, by their conduct as described above, including but not limited to failing to settle the May 2017 debt for plaintiff's creditor from the HLG "settlement savings fund" escrow account violated the FDCPA including but not limited to the following:
  - a) §1692e(5), engaged in false, deceptive, and misleading representations in connection with the debt collection activities described herein;
  - b) §1692f Otherwise used unfair or unconscionable means to collect or attempt to collect a debt by collecting funds form plaintiff towards an illusory promise of debt remediation when, instead, any financial benefit to plaintiff derived from the *de minimis* debt reduction sought by defendants was overwhelmed by the fees and charges collected by

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defendants resulting in no net financial relief to plaintiff and instead worsened her financial burdens.

#### **COUNT II**

# VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR CREDIT EXTENSION UNIFORMITY ACT (FCEUA) and

# PENNSYLVANIA UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES AND CONSUMER PROTECTION LAW (UTPCPL) (Plaintiff v. All defendants)

- 34. Plaintiff incorporates all foregoing allegations as though set forth in full.
- 35. Defendants are each a "debt collector" as defined by 73 P.S. § 2270.3 of the FCUEA in that, at all times herein, defendant was "engaging or aiding directly or indirectly in collecting a debt owed or alleged to be owed a creditor".
  - 36. Plaintiff is a "consumer" as defined by 73 P.S. § 2270.3 of the FCUEA.
- 37. All of the above contacts by Defendants with plaintiff, including but not limited to attempting to settle the May 2017 debt, were "communications" relating to a debt as defined by 73 P.S. § 2270.3 of the FCUEA.
- 38. Because Defendants' business model is premised on compromising the amount of debt owed rather than eliminating it as an attorney filing a chapter 7 bankruptcy or defending a debt collection litigation, all of the above contacts by Defendants were with the purpose of engaging or aiding indirectly in collecting plaintiff's debts owed or alleged to be owed to her creditors.
- 39. The foregoing acts and omissions of defendant, including but not limited to failing to settle the May 2017 debt for plaintiff's creditor from the HLG "settlement savings fund" escrow account and giving plaintiff a futile illusory contract to conceal the fact that defendants are not providing plaintiff with any legal services to settle any of her

debts constitute numerous and multiple violations of the FCEUA and UTPCPL, including but not limited to 73 P.S. § 2270.4(a), as evidenced by the following conduct:

- a) The use of false, deceptive or misleading representations or means in connection with the collection of a debt;
- b) The use of false representation or deceptive means to collect a debt or obtain information about a consumer;
- c) The use of unfair or unconscionable means to collect or attempt to collect an alleged debt;
- 40. Defendants' acts as described above were also violations of similar provisions in the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act ("FDCPA") which thereby renders such acts *per se* unfair and deceptive practice violations of the Unfair Trade Practices Consumer Protection Law, 73 P.S. § 201-1 *et. Seq.*, FCEUA, 73 P.S. § 2270.4(a).

#### **COUNT III**

## Breach of Contract/ Covenant of Good Faith and Fair Dealing (Plaintiff v. All defendants)

- 41. Plaintiff incorporates all foregoing allegations as though set forth in full.
- 42. Plaintiff and Defendants entered into a contract for legal services.
- 43. Defendants' aforementioned conduct constitutes a breach (express, implied, or as a matter of law) of that agreement to provide competent and effective legal services, as well as a breach of the covenant of good faith and fair dealing.
- 44. As a direct and proximate cause of the aforementioned breach of the agreement to provide legal services, Plaintiff has been damaged, as set forth above.

#### **COUNT IV**

## Professional Negligence/Malpractice (Plaintiff v. Yuthas and Law Firm)

- 45. Plaintiff incorporates all foregoing allegations as though set forth in full. Defendants breached their duty of care to Plaintiff, acting negligently, recklessly, and carelessly failing to provide appropriate and necessary legal advice regarding plaintiff's debt remediation such that defendants paid defendants far more than the de minimis reduction of her overall debt burden so as to worsen her overall financial situation.
- 46. As set forth above and at all times material hereto, Defendants failed to possess and/or exercise the ordinary skill, knowledge and care normally possessed and exercised by members of good standing in the legal profession.
- 47. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants, negligence, carelessness and recklessness, Plaintiff suffered actual loss in the amount of thousands of dollars paid as described herein for no benefit derived and continued credit damage over the last two years.

#### <u>COUNT V</u> - Breach of Fiduciary Duty (Plaintiff v. Yuthas and Law Firm)

- 48. Plaintiff incorporates all foregoing allegations as though set forth in full.
- 49. Plaintiff and Defendants were in a fiduciary, attorney-client relationship.
- 50. Defendants' aforementioned conduct constitutes a breach of that fiduciary relationship.
- 51. As a direct and proximate cause of the aforementioned breach of fiduciary duty, Plaintiff has been damaged (as set forth above).

#### PRAYER

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against defendants, jointly and

severally, or singly as indicated, for:

(a) Actual damages in the form of emotional distress and statutory damages in a

sum to be determined for violating the FDCPA pursuant to 15 U.S.C. Section

1692k;

(b) Costs and reasonable attorney's fees pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692k(a)(3);

(c) Actual and compensatory Damages against defendants;

(d) Actual damages pursuant to 73 P.S.§ 201-9.2(a) against Defendants;

(e) Treble actual damages pursuant 73 P.S.§ 201-9.2(a) against Defendants;

(f) Costs of litigation and reasonable attorney's fees pursuant to 73 P.S.§ 201-

9.2(a), and;

(g) Such other and further relief as the Court shall deem just and proper.

#### **JURY DEMAND**

Plaintiff demands trial by jury.

ROBERT P. COCCO, P.C.

BY: /s/Robert P. Cocco

Attorney for Plaintiff

Dated: June 16, 2017